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Thesis

THE RELIGION OF MATTHEW ARNOLD

by

Dorothy Ethel Hofmann

(A. B., Brown, 1926)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

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INTRODUCTION

The masses have long branded all attempts to explain the Scriptures in any way other than literal as sacrilege and atheism. That this is mere ignorance and the result of bigoted training by dogmatic theologians, we shall try to show by an examination of Matthew Arnold's literary criticism of the Bible and his own religious beliefs. It is a false charge based on superficial grounds that Matthew Arnold was an atheist, agnostic, enemy of the Christian Church. He was, without doubt, the outstanding critic and interpreter of religion in nineteenth century England. But while he lived, he was the target of much scathing criticism, most of which received its impetus from orthodox clergymen. Stuart Sherman says of this: "Certainly none of Arnold's other activities excited so much opposition among his contemporaries as did his writing on theology, religion, and the church."[1] Contrary to general belief, Arnold was not looking for the disestablishment of the Church of England; he felt that the latter needed reconstruction from within. He also hoped for the union of other churches within the national church. Speaking before the London clergy at Sion College, Arnold said, "I regard the Church of England as, in fact, a great national

[1] Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him p. 270

society for the promotion of what is generally called goodness, and for promoting it through the most effectual means possible, the only means which are really and truly effectual for the object: through the means of the Christian religion and the Bible."[1] But by Victorian conservatives Arnold was regarded as the destroyer of religion. After the publication in 1873 of Literature and Dogma, sub-titled An Essay Toward a Better Apprehension of the Bible, charges of atheism and heresy rose so fast from British ecclesiastics that Arnold wrote in self-defense and in refutation of the charges imputed against him God and the Bible, sub-titled A Review of Objections to 'Literature and Dogma'. Arnold's purpose had been misunderstood and he replies somewhat cryptically in the Introduction of the last-mentioned book: "We have said, and it is important to maintain it, that popular Christianity at present is so wide of the truth, is such a disfigurement of the truth, that it fairly deserves, if it presumes to charge others with atheism, to have that charge retorted upon itself; and future ages will perhaps not scruple to condemn it as mercilessly as Polycarp condemned the religion of heathen antiquity." We are told that this Polycarp, when charged with atheism, retorted, "Away with the atheists." So Arnold, charged himself with atheism, turns the charge upon popular theologians and metaphysicians.

[1] St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 312

But with the lapse of three quarters of a century and with greater liberal-mindedness, a heritage received from such men as Matthew Arnold, we regard Arnold only as a constructive critic, who, seeing science and other enlightenments undermining the very props of religion, tried to give it new stability and security by substituting verifiable facts for unverifiable dogma. He saw that a compromise must be made between the old religion and intruding science. Evolution had presented itself to the Victorian public. Natural law as the motivating force of all the phenomena of the universe was slowly being recognized. Skepticism was rife. It was the realization of the spread of this skepticism and the "lapsed masses"[1] which led Arnold to write his essays on religion.

Arnold did not wish to make these masses turn away in scorn from the Bible; instead he wished to turn their attention once more to that true source of righteousness which unfortunately was being deprecated by many who had easily lost their faith. Never does Arnold denounce the Bible. Is there not an ardent tribute to Christianity and its promoters in these eloquent words?--- "Reverence for all, who, in those first dubious days of Christianity, chose the better part, and resolutely cast in their lot with 'the despised and rejected of men' ! Gratitude to all, who while the tradition was yet fresh, helped by their writings to

[1] Preface to Literature and Dogma p. vi.

preserve and set clear the precious record of Jesus!"[1] Or again, let us read in Arnold's own words his purpose in writing Literature and Dogma: "But let us recall the object for which Literature and Dogma was written. It was written in order to win access for the Bible and its religion to many of those who now neglect them. It was written to restore the use of the Bible to those (and they are in increasing number) whom the popular theology with its proof from miracles, and the learned theology with its proof from metaphysics, so dissatisfy and repel that they are tempted to throw aside the Bible altogether."[2] Arnold had feared the rise of a revolutionary Deism, a doctrine, let us remember, which denies the Christian revelation and asserts only the existence of a personal God existing apart from the universe. Of Arnold's ideas of God we shall speak later. The important point to note here is that Arnold wished to preserve Christianity, to restore the use of the Bible, and to make it accessible to all.

The question now arises, What was Arnold's own state of mind during the religious upheaval? The volcano could not erupt without affecting so sensitive a soul as Arnold's. He too had felt the shock. It is an old truism that we cannot understand unless we have felt. And Arnold was not the disinterested reporter, writing objectively from a safe

1 Literature and Dogma p. 128

2 God and the Bible p. 5

point of vantage. Instead he was groping, as many others, with "lame hands of faith"[1], for a larger hope in religion. Arnold had two outlets for his theological queries, prose and poetry. Now Arnold was more the critic than the philosopher, for through all his searchings he remained clear-sighted and logical, balancing both sides of every question. He applied his own doctrine of "sweet reasonableness" to his writings. His prose is analytical, to a degree of coldness, unimpassioned, and characterized by a beauty and lucidity of expression. But as his prose is intellectual, so his poetry is emotional. In the one he expresses what he reasons to be true; in the other what he feels to be true. The issue of the mind is not the same as that of the heart. Arnold himself said that "poetry attaches emotion to the idea"[2]; it is written "to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us."[2]

Moreover, Arnold's poetry and prose represent different periods of his life. Most of his poetic work was written in the decade 1850-1860. After that there was no volume of poetry added till 1867 when New Poems appeared, but this in large measure was made up of reprinted poems. It seemed that after that the

1 In Memoriam by Tennyson

2 Essay on Poetry from Essays on Criticism - Vol. 2-p. 2

poetical vein was drying up. Arnold himself admitted in a letter to his sister that poetical composition was becoming more difficult. On the other hand, his first significant work in religious criticism, St. Paul and Protestantism, did not appear till 1870. For a long time Arnold had remained aloof from the religious upheaval, but when he saw that the revolution was inevitable, he entered the fray with reluctance. Arnold himself said in the Preface to Last Essays, "Assuredly it was not for my own pleasure that I entered upon them [religious questions] at first, and it is with anything but reluctance that I now part with them. Neither can I be ignorant what offence my handling of them has given to many whose goodwill I value, and with what relief they will learn that the handling is now to cease."

Arnold's method of procedure in testing the heretofore accepted ideas in religion was thoroughly inductive. He openly asserts himself as the enemy of dogma, creeds, and metaphysics. He was a searcher for the truth and he had little patience with the man who passively accepted his religion without first proving that it was reasonable to believe. In his own words: "The man who believes that his truth on religions is so absolutely the truth that say it when, and where, and to whom he will, he cannot but do good with it, is in our day almost always a man whose truth is half blunder, and wholly useless."[2] Less

[1] St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 157

[2] Preface to Literature and Dogma - p.5

caustically he pleads for the active search for God in his poem, Obermann Once More:

"Unduped of fancy, henceforth man
'Must labour! - must resign
His all to human creeds, and scan
Simply the way divine."

Arnold's way to reach the divine was by culture, sweetness and light, or knowing the best that had been thought and said. He turned not first to the metaphysics of Anglican ecclesiastics, not to the materialistic philosophers born of the French Revolution, but to the Bible. Later in his own development he would try to prove or disprove the atheism of Spinoza, the heresy of Heine, and the speculative intuition of Amiel.

Arnold, like Tennyson, fought his way through to a new faith, that was to be stronger than the old, for all the chaff was to be cast away. There is no more melancholy expression of Arnold's own doubts than in the majestic, sweeping lines of Dover Beach:

"The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd,
But now I only hear
Its melancholy long withdrawing roar
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

But yet the greater hope for humanity and its end is expressed in To A Republican Friend:

"Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
When bursting through the network superposed
By selfish occupation - plot and plan,

"Lust, avarice, envy - liberated man,
All difference with his fellow-mortal closed,
Shall be left standing face to face with God."

Wavering thus between doubt and faith, Arnold continued for a life-time to weigh the worth of all religious ideas. His conclusions are seldom traditional or conventional, but they are logical and verifiable. In the midst of uncertainty he found firm ground on which to lay his final faith.

We shall now examine, step by step, Arnold's conclusions on the various ideas of religion as we have inherited them from the writers of the Old and New Testaments. Since man's conception of a Power higher than himself was first responsible for the religious institution, Arnold sought primarily to define God, the name mankind has given that Power.

GOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Arnold did not wish to be regarded as a theologian, but rather as a critic of religion. For etymologically, theology means science of God, and Arnold believed that religion could not be treated from a scientific point of view. Instead he would apply the literary and historic methods. This naturally follows since the language of the Bible is literary, not scientific. The word "God", for example, means "brilliant" or "shining". Yet man's conceptions of God have gone far beyond this original meaning. No one has ever fully understood God, so from the very beginning the idea of some Supreme Power has been surrounded with feeling and figures of speech. Arnold frequently defines religion as "morality tinged with emotion". Now nothing tinged with emotion or expressed in figurative language can be regarded from a scientific viewpoint. Historically, if we are truly to understand the Bible, we must be conversant with the language and history of Israel, for men's thoughts, words, and meanings change. Israel, at the time of the Revelation, was in the childhood of its race, inspired and very much exalted as the chosen people, to whom the Revelation had been given. And it avails nothing to compare the ancient Hebrews with the modern Jews. A child never sees with the eyes of a man.

Moreover, there are apparent contradictions in the Bible. Of course. No two writers were experiencing with an equal amount of understanding or seeing with the same visionary power.

Approaching Matthew Arnold's ideas of God, we find that he emphatically denies the anthropomorphic conception. For let us remember that Arnold will accept nothing which is not verifiable. Now personification has always been a device for making things about us seem more real. We do not take literally the poet's personification of Spring, or the Moon, or the West Wind. Or in Arnold's own words: "We make persons out of sun, wind, love, envy, war, fortune; in some languages every noun is male or female. But this we know is figure and personification."[1] We read with pleasure the old Greek myths, but we never believe for a moment that supermen dwelt on the summit of Mt. Olympus. "What was the Apollo of the religion of the Greeks?" asks Arnold. "The law of intellectual beauty, the eternal not ourselves that makes for intellectual beauty."[2] Still more forcefully Arnold illustrates the use of personification by this: "Xenophanes says that if horses, oxen, and lions could paint or model, they would certainly make gods in their own image - horses in that of horses, oxen in that of

1 _God and Bible_ - Ch. 1 - p. 33

2 _God and Bible_ - p. 81

oxen."[1] For Arnold, then, God was not a Being conceived in man-likeness.

Nor will Arnold accept the metaphysical definition of God. Descartes, who defines God as "Being" fails to satisfy Arnold, for he asks, "What is Being?"[2] M. Emile Burnouf in La Science des Religions calls God a "cosmic unity". But this, too, Arnold rejects, for he says, "But we see every day that the making religion into metaphysics is the weakening of religion".[3]

For his explanation of God, Arnold goes to the Old Testament to study primarily Israel and the way in which these people became conscious of a Power higher than themselves. Israel prayed, "I will give thanks unto thee, O Eternal, with my whole soul." "Word Eternal is verifiable." is Arnold's first thesis.[4] Now Israel also said, "Righteousness tendeth to life."[5] In the Eighteenth Psalm David expressed that men who do right have a covenant with the Eternal. Historically it is true that the Hebrews were the first to feel strongly the principles of conduct or right living. But whence came the conscious-

1 God and the Bible - p. 117

2 God and the Bible - p. 63

3 Literature and Dogma - p. 110

4 Literature and Dogma - p. 56

5 Prov. XI, 19

ness that "Righteousness tendeth to life?"[1] Arnold acknowledges a higher Power then by this fact: "We did not make ourselves and our nature, or conduct as the object of three fourths of that nature; we did not provide that happiness should follow conduct as it undeniably does."[2] Where do these suggestions and stimulations come from? The answer is Arnold's famous definition found repeatedly throughout his religious essays. "The Eternal not we ourselves that makes for righteousness." As this Eternal Power is noumenal and has never been known to man through any of his senses, Arnold refuses to conceive it in any material form. In like manner Arnold explains the conception of Satan. He says, "Attention is then drawn, afterwards, to causes outside ourselves which seem to make for sin and suffering..... So arise Satan and his angels."[3] Cannot one deduce from these statements a logical explanation for the polytheism of the Greek religion? Gods, conceived as supermen, with certain attributes emphasized in each, were the sources of man's instincts. So Venus becomes the law of physical beauty; Minerva of wisdom; Bacchus of evil and indulgence. But Greek culture failed and Greek civilization degenerated because they had been

1 Prov. XI, 19

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 24

3 Literature and Dogma - p. 36

denied that signal apparition given to the Jews, the all-important sense of conduct. Herein lies the supremacy of Hebraic civilization over Hellenic. Matthew Arnold was, above all, a moralist, and he therefore attributes to the Hebraic religion, a moral basis. He believed that progress of any kind was incompatible with immorality.

So far we have seen that Arnold regards God as the "true source of righteousness", conduct as three fourths part of our nature, and right living as the only sure way to success and happiness. Then the "not ourselves" inspires awe and reverence. Thus it was that Israel came to worship this power that suggested his living a righteous life. And gradually he came to attach emotion to the glorious revelation. Fervently he praised the Eternal, "I will give thanks unto thee, O Eternal, with my whole heart; at midnight will I rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments."[1] Such apostrophe could not but result in the conception of a magnified man, whom Israel was addressing. Poetry and personification came to surround the whole idea. And says Arnold, "Anthropomorphic he [Israel] is, for all men are. Being a man himself, he naturally speaks of the Power as a man also."[2] But it is important to note that it was not until after Moses came that the words Lord and Jehovah, suggesting a magnified man, were attached to the

[1] Ps. CXXXVIII, 1; CXIX, 62

[2] Literature and Dogma - p. 290

Power. At that time the Jews had erred, had been in bondage, and therefore had the greater need for imploring God in an ardent personal manner. And also Moses was a prophet, very much moved; he imagined that God could be seen and attributed to him the passions of anger and jealousy. Arnold adds: "God is a father, because the power in and around us, which makes for righteousness, is indeed best described by the name of this authoritative, but yet tender and protecting relation."[1]

Arnold does not object to such poetic language, for he realizes that man may best be consoled and carried over the difficult places by the tide of joyful and bounding emotions. He himself says, "The paramount virtue of religion is, that it has lighted up morality; that it has supplied the emotion and inspiration needful for carrying the sage along the narrow way perfectly, for carrying the ordinary man along it at all."[2] But it is necessary that we distinguish between facts verifiable by natural law and ideas made beautiful and appealing by the garb of poetic language. The child early outgrows that identity of the Spirit of Christmas and a grand old man with a pack of inexhaustible gifts. But man refuses to forego the delusion that the Eternal is a magnified man. And hence misconceptions arise. Arnold's point of view is excellently set forth

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 31

2 Essays on Criticism - Ch. Marcus Aurelius

in this passage: "In the language of common speech and poetry, we speak of the Eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness, as if he were a person who thinks and loves. Naturally we speak of him so, and there is no objection to our so doing.

"But it is different when we profess to speak exactly, and yet make God a person who thinks and loves.....So we construct a magnified and non-natural man, by dropping out all that in man seems a sort of weakness and inserting its contrary, and by heightening to the very utmost all that in man seems a source of strength, such as his thought and love.....Then between this magnified man and ourselves we put, if we please, angels, who are men etherealised. The objection to the magnified man and the men etherealised is one and the same: that we have absolutely no experience whatever of either the one or the other."[1] Arnold thus dismisses the possibility of the existence of angels. And, as we shall see later, he explains them away in much the same manner in his discussion of miracles.

Departing from Arnold's prose and turning to his poetry, we find that he too uses the same personification and emotional language which he has been telling us to avoid in our definition of God. Yet there is no contra-

[1] God and the Bible - Ch. 1 - p. 34

diction here, if we remember that poetry is never couched in exact language and that it is never the vehicle of science or criticism or definition. Arnold's flights of imagination and hopes, his depths of despair and doubts are emotionally expressed in his poems. What he knows to be true, because it can be verified and proved, he has analyzed for us in his prose dissertations. Already we have said that he denounces the metaphysical definition of God as Being. Yet reading A Nameless Epitaph, we find:

"Ask not my name, O friend!
That Being only, which hath known each man
From the beginning, can
Remember each unto the end."

Again this is not inconsistency. Arnold may be humanizing God and giving him the faculty of memory, but it is only his imagination which is doing so, imagination which is the refuge for all of us at times. The child uses it in his play; adult man, in his aspirations.

Or what could be more poetic, yet less exact than this flight of fancy?

"Heard accents of the eternal tongue
Through the pine branches play."[1]

Did Arnold believe that God spoke aloud to man in his hours of solitude and communion with nature? The answer

[1] In Memory of the Author of "Obermann"

is obviously no. Even the orthodox member of the Church of England would be most likely to answer no to this question. Yet here is a reflection of the God-in-Nature philosophy of Wordsworth, a poet whom Arnold admired greatly and whose influence may be noticed considerably in the latter's poetry. For Arnold, like Wordsworth, believed in the consoling power of the imagination. Poetry for both was "the finer breath of the emotions", not the intellect.

Arnold, again, had been much interested in the life and teachings of Spinoza. In fact, in his own mind he had refuted the popular contention that the latter was an atheist. There is much in common in the lives of these two: each had for his ideal the intellectual life; both sought for completer knowledge of God; and both lived simple, studious lives. It is quite easily explained then that one should find traces of pantheism in Arnold's poetry. We remember Spinoza's famous concept that each of us is but a wave on the boundless deep of God. And then let us read these lines from Heine's Grave:

> "What are we all, but a mood,
> A single mood, of the life
> Of the Spirit in whom we exist,
> Who alone is all things in one?
> Spirit, who fillest us all!
> Spirit, who utterest in each
> New-coming son of mankind
> Such of thy thoughts as thou wilt!"

These few excerpts, different as they are in tone and philosophy, illustrate emotional moods through which Arnold had passed until he came to pin himself down to a rational definition of God. True, as we have said before, the poetic instinct suffered. Arnold became the cold analyst, throwing aside dogma and creed, stripping God of myth and legend, finally to tell us that he is "The Eternal not we ourselves that makes for righteousness."

But let us conclude this chapter not only with this definition impressed on our minds, but also with an idea of Arnold's attitude to all extra-belief, which is the translation of the German aberglaube. "Aberglaube is the poetry of life".[1] It is extra-belief when Arnold mentions "his heavenly friend" in Human Life or "just-pausing Genius" in The Scholar Gypsy. The language of poetry shall always be the language of extra-belief. For the latter is the short cut to man's desire. We long for what we cannot have, what we know in our logical selves we never can have. We personify God, call him our Father, appeal to him as individuals, and hope that he will heed our pleas.

Arnold would not sweep away the poetry of life, but he would have it clearly differentiated from the real, lest the uncertain come to be confused with the certain. In that case religion might totter altogether. So when

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 97

the prosaic-minded Victorian asked, "What is God? Science tells me he cannot be a magnified man, or a Personal First Cause", Arnold held out his definition: "A Power that makes for righteousness." He had found something verifiable to which religion might cling when it chose to lay aside the aberglaube.

The God of the poetic religion of the past is a man who thinks and loves; the God of a rational religion like Arnold's is "The Eternal not we ourselves that makes for righteousness." The two are not so incompatible as they are incomparable, for they are as different as poetry and prose, or as the emotions and the intellect.

CHRIST AND HIS TEACHINGS

As Matthew Arnold believed in God as the Power outside ourselves that makes for righteousness, so also he believed in Jesus Christ, Son of God and teacher of righteousness to the Jewish people. But he believed in a Jesus Christ from whom all miracles were detached. For Arnold the great Savior was a man who lived and died as all men do and, above all, one whose performances were entirely explainable by science. Jesus Christ is figuratively the Son of God or righteousness, "because he gives the method and secret by which alone is righteousness possible."[1] Arnold never accepted the idea of the Immaculate Conception, but although he denies Christ divinity by birth, he deduces from Paul's writings the greatest claim Christ or anyone could have to divinity: "For Paul who approached Christianity through his personal experience, it was Christ's being without sin which establishes his divinity."[2] Always Arnold regards Christ as the ideal of pure and right living. He alone of all Israel was divine and still is so, because he alone of all mankind was without sin.

That Arnold always firmly believed that Christianity must be kept alive for all time is easily shown by such a statement as this: "Nothing will do except righteousness;

[1] Literature and Dogma - p. 300

[2] St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 53

and no other conception of righteousness will do, except Jesus Christ's conception of it: his method and secret."[1] Yet short-sighted Victorians must have overlooked such fine tributes as these when they charged the writer with heresy. And they did so frequently, for three years later Arnold himself said: "Here in England that book [Literature and Dogma] passes, in general, for a book, revolutionary and anti-religious."[2]

Arnold studied not only the life and teachings of Christ, as recorded by his disciples, but also Israel's state of mind before Christ's birth, the preparation for the coming of the great Messiah. With Israel at that time religion had become a social rather than a personal matter. The Jews had come to worship the Eternal mechanically and without reverence; they had become idolaters, and the heart had no share in the performance of their duties. But Christ brought the lesson of humility and meekness; the idea of a personal religion consisting in inward feeling. Herein lay the essence of Christianity. Christ taught men to look into their own souls, saying, "How is man advantaged if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of himself?"[3] This inwardness and self-reconstruction were aspects of Christianity that Arnold most admired.

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 335
2 St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 159
3 Luke IX, 25

Now we must digress here long enough to say that there is much in Matthew Arnold's writings which at the time of their publication did stir up animosity in the Church and even personal antipathies. And justly so, for at times Arnold deals directly in well-aimed invective. For instance, Arnold was always the open enemy of the Puritans. He blamed them for bringing politics into religion and for wanting to establish a theocracy, or a religious state. He charged that they forgot to look to their own souls in the ordering of their rights. They were aggressive where they should have been humble. Arnold comments rather poignantly on this matter by drawing a parallel between Israel and the Puritans: "The time had come for inwardness and self-reconstruction, - a time to last till the self-reconstruction is fully achieved. It was the error of the Jews thay they did not perceive this; and the old error of the Jews the Puritans, without the Jews' excuse, faithfully repeated."[1] In this thesis we have tried to avoid specific reference to any propaganda of local or temporal interest to be found in Arnold's discussions. But it is wise to admit that there is such, for in part it may explain the unfair and harsh treatment of Arnold by his critics.

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 87

We have said in the beginning of this chapter that Arnold believed in Christ as the teacher of righteousness. There is nothing new in that idea nor in the principles attached to it of inwardness, mildness, and self-renouncement. Arnold sums up Christ's service to man thus: "Jesus Christ's solemn and dolorous condemnation of sin does actually loosen sin's hold and attraction upon us who regard it, - makes it easier for us to understand and love goodness, to rise above self, to die to sin."[1] Arnold never ceases to marvel at that great character who was without sin.

But he unflinchingly denounces the so-called aberglaube, or extra-belief, which came to be attached to the great figure. In brief, he calls it "a vast extra-belief of a phantasmagorical advent of Jesus Christ, a resurrection and judgment, Christ's adherents glorified, his rejectors punished everlastingly."[2] And he regrets the fact that Christianity came to rest on prophecy and miracle.

Regarding the resurrection of Jesus, Arnold says a great deal, trying to explain away the miraculous phase of it and maintaining that like many other words in the Bible it is used figuratively. He points out that the Bible-narrators admit themselves that Christ after his resurrection was not known by Mary Magdelene, nor by his

[1] St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 93

[2] Literature and Dogma - p. 95

most intimate apostles. It is as if they were saying, "Behold a legend growing under your eyes!"[1] What then for Matthew Arnold did the resurrection stand for? Now of all the accounts of Jesus Christ, Arnold rates most highly Paul's. Speaking of Paul, Arnold says, "Real life for Paul begins with the mystical death which frees us from the dominion of the external shalls and shall nots of the law. From the moment, therefore, that Jesus Christ was content to do God's will he died.....The resurrection Paul was striving after for himself and others was a resurrection now, and a resurrection to righteousness."[2] Death, then, for Matthew Arnold, as it is used in the Bible, meant the renouncement of the life of sin; resurrection, the rising to a life of righteousness. This explanation may not be altogether satisfying, since in all the Gospels such frequent reference is made to the various incidents surrounding the resurrection. But Arnold also suggested, "The miracle of the corporeal resurrection ruled the minds of those who have reported Christ's sayings for us; and their report, how he foretold his death, cannot always be entirely accepted."[3] Arnold reminds us always that the language of the Bible is literary and approximate, never

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 132

2 St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 71

3 Literature and Dogma - p. 218

adequate for scientific interpretation.

Christ transcended all his time. He was the master; his disciples were the children. In questioning the validity of Biole language, Arnold states, "Jesus was over the heads of his reporters; what, therefore, in their report of him, is Jesus, and what is the reporters?"[1] Jesus himself used aberglauoe to make the Jews grasp his secret. Again says Arnold, "With such a construction in his thoughts to govern his use of it, Jesus loved and freely adopted the common wording and imagery of the popular Jewish religion."[2] We shall speak more of the inadequacy of Bible language in our discussion of miracles in the next chapter.

To further illustrate this contention, Arnold considers that saying of Jesus: "He that eateth me shall live by me"[3], which is the source of our ceremony of communion in the church. Of course, this is figurative language, says Arnold. Investigating his interpretation, we find, "It means that a man, receiving Jesus, obtains a source of refreshment for himself and oecomes a source of refreshment for others; and it means this generally, without any limitation to a special time."[4] Certainly it is logical to agree with Arnold on this point, yet there is no clearer example of placing a narrow and mechanical interpretation on what Jesus said if we are to take this statement

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 145

2 St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 232

3 John VI, 57

4 Literature and Dogma - p. 157

literally. Giving a second illustration of Arnold's understanding of Jesus' imagery, we again quote this: "And surely every one must perceive that when Jesus spoke to his disciples of their sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, or of their drinking new wine with him in the kingdom of God, he was adopting their material images and beliefs, and was not speaking literally."[1]

We next approach the idea of what Arnold frequently called "the method and secret of Jesus". Now Jesus, we have said, came to Israel at a time when the regard for righteousness or the worship of God had become a mechanical rite. Jesus sought to restore the intuition of the Jews and the correct conception of righteousness. For Israel's original revelation had been: "The Eternal loveth righteousness; to him that ordereth his conversation right shall be shown the salvation of God."[2] Now Jesus' method, asserts Arnold, was by repentance; his secret, peace. Jesus wished to change the inner man, to make him repent and be conscience-stricken. His lesson was comparable to the famous Greek maxim, "Know thyself."

It is, then, very easy to see that Matthew Arnold's admiration of Christ centers on his teachings of right living

1 St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 220

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 263

rather than on the miracles which he is reported to have performed. One does not have to read far in the critic's writing to note that above all, he is the moralist, with whom conduct counted as at least three-fourths of life. It seems at times that Arnold is almost too prosaic-minded, too cold and unimpassioned in his thought, as we have elsewhere said. But Arnold's mind was also the poet's mind. To Hellenism he gave credit, let us not forget, although perhaps not so much, for art, literature, and beauty, as he did to Hebraism for morality. But he also felt that a reign of too much check and restraint was a negative state of things. To Jesus he pays tribute for having lighted up the idea of morality, for showing that peace and happiness are the issue of doing righteously.

And thus it follows that Arnold was so anxious to restore the use of the Bible to the lapsed masses, for in it is contained "the method and secret of Jesus". Therefore he addresses these masses: "Attempt to reach righteousness by any way except that of Jesus, and you will find out your mistake.....and we have neglect of the Bible punished just as putting one's hand into the fire is punished: namely, by finding we are the worse for it."[1] But he advised that allowance be made for the aberglaube in which Jesus himself was forced to indulge in order to be understood and in

[1] Literature and Dogma - p. 301

which his disciples and later reporters were even more deeply immersed. Otherwise, those who wish their faith to be compatible with reason will thrust aside the Bible and consequently conduct. That history has proven this, we need only to recall the "Let us return to nature" cry of the Renascence. But when the pendulum swung back, it brought a further reactionary movement, namely, Puritanism. And adds Arnold, "The great middle class, the kernel of the nation, entered in the prison of Puritanism, and had the key turned upon its spirit there for two hundred years."[1]

We may say then that the main thesis of Arnold's discussions of Christianity is "Hold aloft the teachings of Jesus." He considered it the great glory and grandeur of the Catholic Church that it first laid hold on Jesus' method and secret, no matter how blindly. For dogmatic theologians and mataphysicians who put unverifiable and miraculous interpretations on the works of Christ, he has no such tolerance. He would reduce all ecclesiastical definition to plain talk: "Jesus is no metaphysical phantom, but a living man having to do with conduct. Religion is no intellectualism, but righteousness."[2] For Christianity released from the bonds of dogma Arnold held high hopes. Experience has proven its value, for the

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 322

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 240

infinite truth and attractiveness of Jesus' teachings have survived in spite of the fallible treatment which they have so often been given.

We close the chapter with these convincing words of faith, as expressed by Arnold, uppermost in our minds: "I believe, then, that the real God, the real Jesus, will continue to command allegiance, because we do, in fact, 'belong to them.' I believe that Christianity will survive because of its natural truth."[1]

[1] St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 177

MIRACLES

Arnold was born of an age, the thinking part of which was insisting upon the explanation of all phenomena by science. It is no wonder then that he, whose mind was perhaps even more analytical and logical than those of his contemporaries, refused to believe the accounts of all miracles. Do we today accept the exaggerated tales of wonder as recorded in the annals of Plutarch and Herodotus? Rather we have our word legend for them, and thus explain them away without further worry. But the halo of sanctity has so long surrounded the Bible miracles that it took a daring soul like Arnold's to look behind the veil publicly. Upon investigation, he arrived at the thesis that miracles are a stumbling block in the way of religion rather than a ladder to it. For they conceal the true worth and integrity of the performers behind them, especially for the masses who in their hearts do not believe, but who nevertheless have not had the temerity to assert their doubt. Thus skepticism is easily born of half-doubt and half-knowledge. Arnold therefore contends, "But in miracles we are dealing, we find, with the unreal world of fairy tale. Having no reality of their own, they cannot lend it as foundation for the reality of anything else".[1]

[1] God and the Bible - p. 49

It is far better, for example, that we remember the courage and daring of the flight of the children of Israel out of Egypt than the so-called miraculous opening of the Red Sea, for that was made possible by tide and circumstance, over which neither the fugitives nor their deliverer had any control. Arnold wished that the Bible be made independent of miracles. Repeatedly he sought to convince the masses of the liability of Bible writers to mistake. As an illustration: "Such a case we find in the confident expectation and assertion, on the part of the New Testament writers of the approaching end of the world. Even this mistake people may try to explain away, but it is so palpable that no words can cloud our perception of it. 'The time is short. The Lord is at Hand.'"[1] There is no greater evidence of error, for certainly the end did not come.

Jesus himself tried to check reliance on miracles, for he realized the susceptibility of his people to belief in them. He said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."[2] And again: "Jesus groaned in his spirit and said, Why doth this generation ask for a sign?"[3] Christ never related his own miracles to us; he was not a New Testament writer. Therefore, he was not responsible for the vast amount of aberglaube with which his reporters

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 124

2 John IV, 48

3 Mark VIII, 12

have surrounded him. Arnold's advice in these words seems wise: "Simple, flexible common sense is what we most want, in order to follow truly the dealings of that spontaneous, irregular, wonderful power thich gives birth to tales of miracle,- imagination."[1] Arnold reminds us repeatedly throughout his works that after all, the language of the Bible is literary and approximate, not scientific.

Now Jesus is reported to have effected many miraculous cures of dread diseases. But says Arnold, "Medical science has never gauged,- never, perhaps, enough set itself to gauge,- the intimate connection between moral fault and disease."[2] What Jesus really did then was to cleanse the souls of his people, to bring light and happiness to their darkened, jaded lives. He purified unclean spirits by teaching them righteous living, the law of God. In testimony of this, Jesus himself said, "What does it matter whether I say, Thy sins are forgiven thee! or whether I say, Arise and walk!"[3] And likewise much aberglaube arose out of Jesus' words, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me, because I live, and ye shall live too."[4] But in reality this manifestation of himself he likely did not mean to be material or external. Again he had been speaking figura-

1 God and the Bible - p. 47

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 129

3 Matthew IX, 5

4 John XIV, 19

tively in order to appeal to a people who so desired to have things expressed in terms of imagery. What he literally meant, Arnold sums up thus: "It is,- like the manifestation of God to him that ordereth his conversation right,- the internal life and joy in keeping the commandments."[1]

There are those who would say that Arnold was merely a destructive critic in trying to break down the belief in miracles. It is true that in so doing he was establishing a negative thesis, namely, that miracles were never performed. But here was a matter where the critic felt that something had to be broken down before the strengthening and reconstruction of a truly religious attitude could go on. In order that he might not be misunderstood in his purpose, he contends, "It is possible to spend a great deal too much time and mental energy over the thesis that miracles cannot be relied on. The thesis, though true, is merely negative, and therefore of secondary importance. The important question is, what becomes of religion,- so precious, as we believe, to the human race,- if miracles cannot be relied on?..... As soon as we satisfy ourselves that on miracles we cannot build, let us have done with questions about them and begin to build on something surer."[2] Feeling that

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 223

2 God and the Bible - p. 37

miracles were doomed because of new enlightenments and the growing scientific trend of mind, Arnold made his object to show that belief in the Bible and in Jesus Christ was not solidary with belief in miracles. For this can we call Arnold either heretic or destroyer? To his critics we say that he did more for religion than against it.

Neither does it seem to us that he was unsympathetic in his treatment of the disciples and reporters. Although he admits them to be fallible in their treatment of many matters, he finds that their fault was not a conscious one, but rather inherent in the nature of things. Here are the chief causes to which he attributes the errors:[1]

1. Oral tradition of half a century preceded written accounts.
2. Things are put out of their true place and order.
3. Failure of memory.
4. Failure to comprehend what Jesus said.

Also, to mankind there has always been an attraction in stories of miraculous import. In Israel's time, as in Caesar's and even Elizabeth's times, there was much talk of portents and omens. Man's imagination naturally runs

[1] Literature and Dogma - Ch. 6

riot under the stress of excitement and emotional crises. He fails to see clearly. And then oral tradition, with its ever present handmaiden, exaggeration, increases the already heightened tale. How easily then do miracles arise! And in spite of their unfirm foundation, they are sustained by popular belief. It is easy and attractive to believe what we want to believe. And illusions and hallucinations, if for no other reason than that they are bewildering and incomprehensible, captivate the interest of men. Arnold illustrates this idea by reference to a well known Bible miracle: "The story of the feeding of the thousands may well have had its rise in the suspension, the comparative extinction, of hunger and thirst during hours of rapt interest and intense mental excitement. In such hours a trifling sustenance, which would commonly serve for but a few, will suffice for many. Rumour and imagination make and add details, and swell the thing into a miracle."[1]

For twenty or more odd centuries man has refused to take the simple view of religion. He has demanded what terrifies, astonishes, and overwhelms him. At least three times in his discussions on miracles, Arnold has repeated this passage from Shakespeare, for he with his great knowledge of human nature, seems to have recognized easily that foible in man's make-up. Arnold

[1] God and the Bible - p. 48

says that his explanation is "far the soundest."[1]

"No natural exhalation in the sky,
No scape of nature, no distemper'd day,
No common wind, no custom'd event,
But they will pluck away his natural cause,
And call them meteors, prodigies, and signs,
Abortives, presages, and tongues of heaven."

And so we could go on indefinitely multiplying instance upon instance where Arnold repudiates the many miracles of the Bible, contending that all phenomena arise out of natural circumstances. But it would be much the negative part of our thesis to do so. What we want to prove is that Arnold wished to receive the Bible as a literary document, none the less precious because we have to admit its meanings to be figurative rather than exact. Dr. Newman, contemporary of Arnold, insisted upon the necessary opposition of faith and reason, saying, "The moral trial involved in faith lies in the submission of the reason to external realities partially disclosed..... Faith is, in its very nature, the acceptance of what our reason cannot reach, simply and absolutely from testimony."[2] But Arnold regards it as a false assumption that there is an opposition between faith and reason. He saw that the two must be made compatible, if religion as revealed in

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 150

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 211

the Bible, is to endure. For miracles, then, let it suffice to say: "Reason tells us that a miracle - understanding by a miracle a breach of the laws of nature - is impossible and that to think it possible is to dishonour God; for the laws of nature are the laws of God, and to say that God violates the laws of nature is to say that he violates his own nature."[1]

[1] Essays on Criticism - Ch. 2 - Spinoza

IMMORTALITY

If there is any aspect of religion about which Arnold was an agnostic, it is immortality. For he would neither affirm nor deny the possibility of a life hereafter. Since no one has ever returned from the portals of death, he felt that we must necessarily remain in ignorance of the great mystery, because to Arnold things were verifiable by experience alone. It was perhaps the dread of oblivion after death, a theory certainly substantiated by science and reason, that often shaped Arnold's pessimism. But that he groped and struggled for something more is undeniable. On this matter Arnold was never the willing agnostic. He sought in his faith for something other than mere scientific explanations could give; it is true that he usually failed, for the reasonableness of things held him strongly. And he could not make immortality seem reasonable. Ever seeking, never succeeding in settling his question, he asks in his poem so aptly entitled A Question:

"Love lends life a little grace,
A few sad smiles: and then,
Both are laid in one cold place,
In the grave.

"We count the hours! Those dreams of ours,
False and hollow,
Do we go hence and find they are not dead?

Do me so pause sua lua ens ens ens ens ens.

Joys we dimly apprehend,
Faces that smiled and fled,
Hopes born here, and born to end,
Shall we follow?"

And in the last analysis, pessimism is the dominant note, and Arnold can account the dreams of immortality little more than "false and hollow".

But the great mystery of life and death never ceased to attract him. At least he never regarded it with slothful indifference or absolute finality. He was almost Socratic in his searchings, and always the same conclusion - "We know nothing." For Arnold, we remember from his Sweetness and Light, curiosity was the impelling force to all knowledge. And to us he reveals his curiosity on this matter:

"A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us - to know
Whence our lives come and where they go."[1]

Yet in a more hopeful vein, he combines two themes in Monica's Last Prayer, the fleetingness of man's creeds and dogma, and the lastingness of God's hereafter:

"Creeds pass, rites change, no altar standeth whole,
Yet we her memory, as she pray'd, will keep,
Keep by this; Life in God and union there."

1 The Buried Life

Nevertheless, we must admit this to be a mere passing gleam of hopefulness on the subject. Arnold was a great admirer of the gypsies, and in both the poems The Scholar Gypsy and Resignation, he commends their stoicism, feeling that man is fortunate when he becomes resigned to the fact that all is transient. It seems to us, however, that the roots of Arnold's pessimism were only two in number: the doubt over immortality and the sting of his contemporaries' criticism. With the latter we are not much concerned, only inasmuch as it ultimately affected the philosophy of the man. We note its effects in Empedocles on Etna and in the bitter invective in some of the prose works. But what we want to remember is that Arnold led a useful and active life, and that he held and sought to promote the larger hopes of religion.

Still there are many poetic expressions of eternity among Arnold's poems. For herein was the medium through which Arnold could express the hopes he could only dare trust to be true in his more impassioned moods as well as his deepest despair. For moments, at least, his master Reason, might be forgotten. Here, for example, Arnold is inspired, as many other poets have been, to peace and optimism by the mighty expanse of the ocean:

"And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast -
.....

Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea."[1]

On the other hand, our earlier reference to Dover Beach, another poem of the sea, showed that a similar scene stirred emotions of doubt, equally as strong as those of hope, in the soul of Arnold.

Deaths of those dear to him had many times saddened the heart of Arnold. Perhaps the hardest of all to bear was the passing of his famous father, a strong character who had left lasting remembrances with all with whom he came in contact. A feeling that such strength of will and firmness of purpose could not be overcome by even death itself, prompts Arnold to ask this:

"O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain!
Somewhere, surely, afar,
In the sounding labour-house vast
Of being, is practised that strength,
Zealous, beneficent, firm!"[2]

Also there were the untimely deaths of his brother in far-off Gibraltar and of Arthur Clough, his beloved friend, whom he has immortalized in Thyrsis. And here he finds but shadowy consolation for death, as he says,

1 The Future

2 Rugby Chapel

"Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circles weaves her shade,
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
.....
And hope, once crush'd, less quick to rise again."

Beautiful sentiment, coming from the innermost springs of Arnold's heart, yet deepest gloom!

And the spectacle of lovely nature, which Arnold greatly admired, only suggested that nature relives itself in cycles, while man has but one span, the span of life - and then the coldness of the grave.

"So it is, so it will be for aye.
Nature is fresh as of old,
Is lovely; a mortal is dead."[1]

Arnold wrote very little love poetry, and his critics remember him mostly as a stern man of critical bent with little of romantic sensibility in him. Yet there are a few beautiful lyrics, no doubt inspired by his early love for Margaret, a love not destined to be realized. Here, then, is a hint of immortality, but not to be taken too seriously. It seems more a romantic fancy, as futile and shadowy as the love affair itself.

1 Youth of Nature

"And we whose ways were unlike here,
May then more neighboring courses ply;
May to each other be brought near,
And greet across infinity."[1]

And in following the waverings of Arnold's hopes and doubts, it would avail nothing to compare the dates of these various excerpts. If represented graphically, they would follow a line rising many times, only to fall again more precipitately than it rose. Moreover, we have said that the poetry was written comparatively early, before the man was completely moulded in his beliefs. Sounder testimony to his thoughts on immortality may best be extracted from his prose works. They are more consistent, more convincing, though less beautiful because they are free from the influence of passion.

Arnold never wrote a single whole chapter on the subject of immortality, which rather proves his own state of vagary about it. Only in rare, unguarded moments does he seem to dare approach the matter. And even then, on these occasions, we must admit his remarks to be more hypothetical than conclusive. His usual didactic tone is missing, and he fails to conceal his own weakness and uncertainty. To the end he is faltering at

1 Switzerland

the mythical fork in the road, life after death pointing one way; complete effacement the other. If he ever made his final choice, it is not revealed in his writings.

Here, for example, he challenges the truth of Bishop Butler's analogy that the laws of moral government in this world are continued in the future world, but he offers no substitute theory. "The positive existence of the world to come must be proved, like the positive existence of the present world, by experience. And of this experience Butler's argument furnishes, and can furnish, not one tittle.

"There may be other reasons for believing in a second life beyond the grave. Christians in general consider that they get such grounds from revelation."[1] Arnold has evidently not found the "other reasons" for belief.

Now historically, the idea of a resurrection of the dead to take their trial for acceptance or rejection in the Kingdom of God, was probably conceived by the Jews about 200 B. C. But this notion Arnold regards as just another instance of the vast extra-belief attached by the imagination of Israel to his religious beliefs. He says of it, "It is a kind of fairy tale, which a man tells himself, which no one, we grant, can prove impossible to turn out true, but which no one, also, can prove to turn

1 God and the Bible - p. 289

out true."[1] Arnold would not reject the possibility of immortality, but no where could he find the proof of it. Must we not conclude then that his stand on the subject was one of agnosticism?

Here then it seems to us is the one flaw in his religious thinking, which was otherwise clear-headed, decisive, and profitable. But in the very nature of things it had to be so. Death is the one mysterious experience, about which any of us can conjecture. That we do so is a well known fact. That Arnold did so is also acknowledged; and for this we cannot condemn him nor deem him any less worthy as an interpreter of religion.

Finally, we quote a passage which sums up admirably the entirety of thought on immortality. "What we reach by hope and presentiment may yet be true; and he would be a narrow reasoner who denied, for instance, all validity to the idea of immortality, because this idea rests on presentiment mainly, and does not admit of certain demonstration."[2] Not only did Arnold feel thus, but undoubtedly so did the masses whom he addressed. For every one's religion is a finely complected fabric of hope and presentiment with the coarser threads of fear and doubt running through it.

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 70

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 97

BIBLE-CANON

At the outset of this chapter two things should be clearly understood, namely, what Bible-Canon is and what Arnold's purpose in the discussion of it was. First, then, by Bible-Canon is meant all those books considered by the first early Synods of Christian clergymen to be worthy of inclusion in the Old and New Testaments. As every layman knows, the Bible in its complete form today does not include all the accounts written about Israel and Jesus. The reason is that many of those accounts were rejected as being unworthy and inaccurate by the aforementioned Synods. A notable example of this is the Apocrypha accepted by some branches of the Christian Church but regarded as spurious and unauthoritative by others. It is not, of course, included in the English Bible. Arnold explains the source then of Bible-Canon: "We have mentioned the African Synods. The two Synods of Carthage,- the first of them held in the year 397 of our era, the second in the year 419,- deliver the Canon of the New Testament as we have it now. All its books, and no others, are canonical."[1]

Now Arnold's discussion of Bible-Canon is literary and critical. What he was trying to discover was the

[1] God and the Bible - p. 169

comparative worth of the various books of the Bible, especially the Gospels. His criticism, even when derogatory, cannot be called atheistic, for it touches not at all upon the holy characters, but upon those who have reported them. The most important question in his mind is, Did those reporters do justice to the life and work of Jesus? The answer must be inevitably no, since Jesus was so superior in understanding to all his contemporaries. Which, then, of the accounts comes the nearest to being perfect? And Arnold's investigations on this matter are so lengthy and involved that the best we can hope to do is to examine a few of his conclusions. A scholar of both Hebraic and classical antiquity, he was well equipped for the study he made. But the degree of one's knowledge imposes proportionate limitations on one's understanding, and it is regrettable that the very masses whom Arnold was trying to reach could never grasp the true purpose and meaning of those discussions. What Arnold saw was that the responsibility for much skepticism and dissension in our churches lay in the faulty interpretation of accounts which were in themselves already faulty. Masses are blind to the fact that they rest their faith not wholly on things divine, but on authorities and dogma which too frequently come tumbling down when new enlightenments rush in.

Arnold was bold enough to deduce that there is absolutely no evidence of the establishment of our Four

Gospels as a Gospel Canon (the selection having been dispersed over four centuries), or even of their existence, as they now stand, before the last quarter of the second century; for "The record, we said, when we first get it, has passed through at least half a century, or more, of oral tradition, and through more than one written account."[1]

Moreover, there is proof that the members of those early Synods did not represent all the best judgment of even their own time. Arnold, investigating the statements of St. Jerome, a great churchman who died in 420 but who was not present at the Synods, found his remarks to be somewhat different in tenor from those of his contemporaries. In a prefatory letter addressed to the Pope in 383, St. Jerome commented on the authorship of several of the Epistles. Of that of James, he said, "It is asserted to have been brought out by somebody else under his name." While of the so-called Second Epistle of Peter, he said, "It is denied by most to be his." And of the three Epistles attributed to St. John, he said, "He wrote one Epistle, which is acknowledged by all churches and scholars, but the remaining two are asserted to be by John the Elder."[2] And there are several other comments in the same vein, too numerous to recount. What then does it avail to

[1] God and the Bible - p. 194

[2] God and the Bible - p. 171

examine these controversies among clergymen of the fourth and fifth centuries? It brings us only to the discouraging conclusion that we can depend very little on so-called authority and that even the revered dignitaries of the Church are more than liable to err in judgment. And yet it is the Church alone which gave authority and sacredness to the Gospel. But the brave man goes along in the face of defeat, and Arnold, seeking for the truth, had first to stumble over and brush aside what was untrue.

Shakespeare lived only a little more than three centuries ago, yet scholars acknowledge that there are evident interpolations and errors in his plays for which he was not responsible. There is much talk of the spurious plays and the obscure lines. What then of accounts twenty centuries and more old, passed along through more mouths and more hands than anyone will ever know? Doesn't the analogy hold true? In both cases we are met with the same problems of interpolation, errors, forgery, and misunderstanding. Arnold speaks of two of these as follows: "The practice of forgery and interpolation was notorious, and the temptation to it was great. One explicit witness is as good as twenty, and we will again take for our witness a great churchman, the ecclesiastical historian Eusebies, Bishop of Caesarea, who died in the year 340. He says that scriptures were

current 'put forth by the heretics in the name of the Apostles, whether as containing the Gospels of Peter and Thomas and Matthias, or those also of any others besides these, or as containing the Acts of Andrew and John and the other Apostles!"[1] And so we might with Arnold bring countless witnesses to bear testimony to the uncertainty of Gospel authorship. It is enough, however, to impress the fact that such uncertainty did exist. Arnold himself doubted that John wrote the Fourth Gospel. He doubted because of internal proofs within the Gospel, such as the Greek philosophy and style manifested in it, and the inaccurate treatment of Palestinian geography and usages, Jewish feelings and ideas.[2]

Turning from the Gospels, we find that Arnold in like manner accounted as naught the sacredness and authority of the Apostles' Creed, which he considered to be not at all the Creed of the Apostles, but rather the outgrowth of popular notion and legend. We quote this excellent passage, because it shows how naturally yet treacherously miracle and aberglaube, held up to be the creed of Jesus and his Apostles, have become the

1 _God and the Bible_ - p. 177

2 _God and the Bible_ - p. 224

pitfalls of the Christian religion:

"As time went on, and Christianity spread wider and wider among the multitudes, and with less and less of control from the personal influence of Jesus, Christianity developed more and more its side of miracle and legend, until to believe Jesus to be the Son of God meant to believe the points of the legend,- his preternatural conception and birth, his miracles, his descent into hell, his bodily resurrection, his ascent into heaven, and his future triumphant return to judgment. And these and like matters are what popular religion drew forth from the records of Jesus as the essentials of belief. These essentials got embodied in a short formulary; and so the creed which is called the Apostles' Creed came together.

"It is not the apostles' creed, for it took more than five hundred years to grow into maturity..... it is the <u>popular science</u> of Christianity."[1]

Arnold made a careful study of all the Gospels, and in so doing he found many discrepancies and contradictions therein. Differences in treatment he attributed to differences in the philosophies of the men reporting. All could not be of equal value. What Arnold wished to show was that the limitations of these reporters need

[1] <u>Literature and Dogma</u> - p. 249

not affect the greatness of Jesus and his teachings. Religion should not suffer because those who have carried it on have sometimes distorted its precepts from their natural meaning. We merely have the reflections of the original happenings through the records of faithful followers of many centuries. Though faithful, their ardor sometimes surpassed their truthfulness. It is not even a photographic record which has survived, but rather a great panorama of the past, the lines and contours of which have been heightened and sometimes reduced by the imagination of its artists. To determine the true proportions of the original object is impossible except by Arnold's method - criticism by the application of knowledge. It was Arnold himself who said, "No man, who knows nothing, knows even his Bible."[1] The more one knows, the more easy it is for him to apprehend the Bible.

Arnold, after comparing carefully the works of the Epistle writers, had great respect for St. John, the author of the First Epistle. He would hold on to such precepts as these: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous"[2] and "If we walk in the light we have fellowship one with another"[3]; for, says Arnold, "he [John] states the secret

1 Culture and Anarchy - p. 139

2 John III, 7

3 John I, 7

of Jesus by its positive and loveliest side."[1] These teachings are much simpler, yet how much more beautiful, than the metaphysical wanderings of the Fourth Gospel, which Arnold doubted, for such reasons and previously mentioned ones, to be by John. Arnold would have the Saviour of mankind no metaphysical phantom, but a living man having to do with conduct!

Arnold's most frequent and pungent reminder was that the language of the Bible was "approximate, not scientific."[2] Arnold, mis-named as atheist, and more mildly as agnostic, was the great liberal-minded and visionary religionist of his time. His open challenge to the validity of certain accounts in the Bible was not a piece of heresy. It was rather a very earnest attempt to reconcile Scriptural statements, obviously unreasonable, with the discoveries accumulated through nearly twenty centuries. He repeatedly pointed out that the Bible was a great literary achievement compiled by a God-inspired people, but that the evaluation and interpretation of its various parts must change with the progress of learning. Ever a seeker for truth, Arnold would have others likewise learn to discriminate the true from the untrue, so that the whole might not

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 240

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 309

be cast aside because of the weakness of some of its parts. This, then, is why he presented his views on Bible-Canon.

CEREMONY

Matthew Arnold was a man of simple tastes with little regard for ostentation of any kind. By nature he was introspective, seeking within himself for the explanation of things. He accepted nothing until it had been proven in the laboratory of his own mind. For him God was a law of conduct; revelation meant the realization that right living is the only key to human happiness. And each individual must discover this for himself. The Bible, for him, was the best handbook, since in it are contained the laws of God, or "the Power not we ourselves that makes for righteousness."

For ceremony, the outward show of things, he had small respect, because he felt that it had no relation whatsoever with man's moral actions. True, it might make morality more attractive since it appealed to another of man's instincts, the aesthetic sense. In that way only might it have a transfer value, in helping by visible demonstration to concentrate man's attention on the laws of God, and consequently the moral order of the universe. How ceremony arose then, he explains in this passage: "From the older religions were handed on ceremonial and rite, which have, in truth, their proper origin, not in the moral stirrings of man's nature at all, but in the stirrings which we call aesthetic."[1]

1 God and the Bible - p. 118

But Arnold considered ceremony as little more than one of the superfluous attachments of religion, the dangers of which are to be guarded against. He looked for the millenium when all that superficial cargo should be dropped by the wayside - creeds, dogma, extra-belief, ceremony, and rites. And we should have left in its stead a religion strengthened in its unity and emphasizing only the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Arnold analyzes the first early mistake of Israel thus: "But the mass of people naturally inclined to place righteousness rather in something mechanical to be given or done,- in being endowed with the character of God's chosen people, or in punctually observing a law full of minute observances."[1] Then Jesus came, correcting this mistake and setting up an immense new inward movement for obtaining one's rule of life. Above all, he taught the secret of inwardness or looking within. "Jesus uttered a warning for all time when he said, 'God is an influence, and those who would serve him must serve him not by any form of words or rites, but by inward motion and in reality.'"[2] And this is the line of thought to which Arnold adhered. Rites and ceremony seemed to him as small tribute to a law, and particularly a law, giving righteousness as its chief tenet. It would be far better

1 Literature and Dogma - p. 168

2 Literature and Dogma - p. 180

if man would learn to take counsel with his own conscience. "And if conscience ever became enough of a power, there would be no offenders to punish. This is the true line of religion."[1] What good then to make showiness and outward demonstration any part of a religion inherently founded on inwardness?

On the other hand, prayer is something far different, and Arnold believed this aspect of religion as one in accord with it, since it stressed the notion of looking within. In a letter written to his mother in 1853, he says, 'I have been reading Margaret Fuller, and again been greatly struck with her sincere striving to be good and helpful. Her address to the poor women in the Penitentiary is really beautiful. 'Cultivate the spirit of prayer. I do not mean agitation and excitement, but a deep desire for truth, purity, and goodness, and you will daily learn how near He is to every one of us.' Nothing can be better than that."

Believing then that ceremony and rites as a means of worship to God was conceived primarily by man as a way of self-gratification rather than self-renouncement, which is one of the foremost principles of Christianity, Arnold attached no significance to them. And his logic on this point is so sound that it would put to shame any dispute to the contrary. Few polemical writers have

[1] Literature and Dogma - p. 131

ever met and answered questions pertaining to religion with the same soundness and reasonableness of Arnold. Therein, we feel, lies part of the grace of his writings.

PREEXISTENCE

But there are many aspects of religion upon which Arnold never touched in his writings. The only explanation for these gaps in his religious discussions is that he himself did not know. There were places where even reasonableness and logic failed to delve out the truth for him. By such men as Dr. Newman it would have been said that it was Matthew Arnold's shortcoming that for him reason had to be the ever-present handmaiden of faith. However that may be, on a few scores Arnold remained the agnostic; on others he never declared himself. Being uncertain to the end of the existence of a hereafter, he never tried in any terms to define its characteristics. He denounced the notion, at least, of man's bodily resurrection. In all of his works there are no references whatsoever to any kind of purgatory after death. He knew only of chastisement in life, nothing of that after. Throughout the first hundred pages of St. Paul and Protestantism, he does deny the doctrines of election and redemption as held and preached by the English Church. He scorned the idea of a few chosen ones being elected by divine choice (a nebulous epithet) for eternal life and joy. Arnold

frequently stated that he believed in salvation, but salvation for what beyond this life he never said.

But it is interesting to note that there are two (and only two) very definite references to the idea of preexistence. And both of these are in his poetry, and one is at a loss to know whether or not to attribute them to poetic fancy or something more tangible in belief. It is more likely that the first conjecture is true. For, could Arnold himself have explained logically the poetic figures used here?

"Since man woke on earth, he knows his story,
But, before we woke on earth, we were.

"Long, long since, undower'd yet, our spirit
Roam'd, ere birth, the treasuries of God."[1]

Where are "the treasuries of God"? Since Arnold denied God even a personality, certainly he could have assigned him no definite locale. And again, we read this selection, written in much the same vein:

"Before man parted for this earthly strand,
While yet upon the verge of heaven he stood,
God put a heap of letters in his hand,
And bade him make with them what word he could."[2]

On "the verge of heaven"? But Arnold never talked in his

1 Self-Deception

2 Revolutions

prose of heaven, since it was one of those nebulous places outside the realm of his experience. Then whence comes the soul if it has preexisted?

And here it seems wise to repeat again what has already been said in the Introduction. It is misleading to attempt an analogy between Arnold's poetry and prose. Ideas expressed in the one are not necessarily confirmed by those expressed in the other. Imagination was the material of the former: experience and reason of the latter. Arnold always recognized the necessity of our imaginative creations, but he warned that they should not be confused with the realities of life. Then why try to compare two things which Arnold wished to be sharply differentiated? As far as the doctrine of preexistence is concerned, it would be presumptuous on our part to say that Arnold did or did not believe in it. Here in the two selections quoted above, we feel, as mentioned in an earlier instance, that there is distinct Wordsworthian influence, but that would be another thesis, with which we are not concerned here. As to birth and death, Arnold must have regarded what was on either side as an insoluble mystery. On this matter also, he was undoubtedly the agnostic. But what of that? Of man's sojourn here we know much; of all that is beyond even the wisest of us can say but this:

"From the great deep to the great deep he goes,
And where is he who knows?"[1]

[1] Passing of Arthur by Tennyson

CONCLUSION

Thus far we have tried to show that Matthew Arnold, a great liberal-minded thinker in an age when skepticism, Dissent, and Puritanism were all rife, saw the need of some expedient to preserve the religion of the English people. All of his contemporaries had experienced the throes of skepticism; Dissent, with its accompanying political issues, was threatening the overthrow of the Church itself and affecting the morale of the bewildered masses; Puritanism was a reactionary movement such as always follows upon a period of excesses and doubts - happily it could not be destined for long life. None of these satisfied Arnold. As Hugh Walker says, "That Arnold at least refused to put faith in any of the panaceas of his time is too obvious to need proof."[1] What he sought was a reconstructed Church and an enlightened religion, which would be just as firm, but more sane and rational than the old. Arnold was not the atheist or heretic his misunderstanding critics called him. The fairest judgment is given by Sherman: "It is quite incontrovertible that Arnold was a friend to religion and to its public establishment. He was, however, a steadily critical friend."[2] And that Arnold was ever

1 The Greater Victorian Poets - p. 271

2 Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him - p. 276

the friend of the Church is confirmed by such a passage as this, the like of which are numerous throughout all of his essays: "The Church of our country is to be considered as a national Christian society for the promotion of goodness, to which a man cannot but wish well, and in which he might rejoice to minister."[1]

And certainly he believed in the Bible, the interpretation of which, however, could not be static but must change with each generation that brought new enlightenments to bear upon it. In a letter to his mother (April 9, 1863) he states an everlasting truth, deny it how we may. "The mass of people take from the Bible what suits them, and quietly leave on one side all that does not." Bishop Butler once said, "The Bible contains many truths as yet undiscovered." On this point Arnold agreed. And what is more, he insisted that an understanding of the Bible should develop gradually and spontaneously, rather than being settled by the dogmatic theologians. Quite naturally by such an open assertion Arnold became the acknowledged enemy of these latter, who in turn charged him with sacrilege and heresy. Their opinions, strengthened by the prestige of the powerful institutions which they represented, unfortunately succeeded all too well and have been accepted by the great majority of the people, none of whom have taken the

[1] St. Paul and Protestantism and Last Essays - p. 214

trouble to read what Arnold said.

In this age of liberalism no one would be shocked by any one of his ideas, most of which are being expressed from our own pulpits today. But unfortunately no one bothers even now to correct the misconceptions surrounding the character of the great critic. It is discouraging to note the condition of his books, especially the prose, in our large city and college libraries today. They are dusty with long disuse, dating in many instances from the decade following his death, which quieted all antagonism but which also stunted current interest. This can further be explained by the fact that Matthew Arnold was a great scholar, whose appeal was largely to scholars. All of his conclusions are supported by the minutest detail, involving a large body of facts and dates concerning classical and Hebraic history. These matters cannot but prove tedious to the ordinary layman who has not even a smattering of such learning. Consequently one can never hope for the popularization of his prose works, which are scholarly but seldom human in appeal. His prodigious efforts never achieved the end for which they were expended. Arnold never reached the masses. One might add that Philistinism still reigns.

Those who do profess to know Arnold first hand know him through his poetry, for which by temperament he was not so well suited as for prose. And here again we con-

front another common charge, that of morose pessimism, which we should like to refute. As a result of his great personal interest in classical lore, Arnold wrote a number of poetic tragedies centering around classical heroes, among which are Mycerinus and Empedocles on Etna. Of these, perhaps the latter is best known. This concerns the fate of an old Greek philosopher, living about 500 B. C., who, weary of this life, has outlived his capacity for human joy and for faith in any divine order. He pours out his invective in such melancholy tones as these:

"The Gods laugh in their sleeve,
To watch man doubt and fear,
Who knows not what to believe
Since he sees nothing clear,
And dare stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure."

Now is it fair to identify these ideas with Matthew Arnold's own? Sherman even says yes, admitting at the same time that while Arnold lived, he protested against the identification. Drama is acknowledged to be largely an objective type of literature. It is rash and unjust to reincarnate the dramatist in all the characters he creates. For three centuries biographers and critics have been insisting that we make neither a Hamlet nor a Falstaff out of Shakespeare. Must we associate all the philosophy of Empedocles and Mycerinus with that of Arnold? If that were so, we would see held up in "the mirror of life" only the images of the playwrights themselves.

Like Empedocles, Mycerinus railed against the Gods:

"Lost labour! when the circumambient gloom
But hides, if Gods, Gods careless of our doom?"

It had been foretold in the destiny of this youth that he would die in six years. Thereafter he rails against these careless, unseeing Gods and spends the rest of his life in revelry. Is there any parallel in such a life and that of Arnold? Then to say that the philosophies are identical is mere presumption. Moreover, Matthew Arnold was too active, too hopeful a man to be long submerged in pessimism. True, he sometimes felt that there was chaos in the arrangements of society, but he looked for and believed in the stabilization of order in all things. Most of all, he never doubted that great law which makes for righteousness and which for him was God.

It might be well at this point to show by a comprehensive summary what Arnold did and did not believe in regard to religious matters. These things he had proven to be true by experience:

1. Existence of God as a law and source of righteousness.
2. Greatness of Jesus Christ's character.
3. Worth of his teachings.
4. Value of Bible as an account of precepts of righteousness and life of Christ.
5. Need of a strong national church (not controlled by the state.)

And of the following he could find no circumstantial proof:

1. Existence of a personal God.
2. Consubstantiality of Christ with a personal God as his Father.
3. Miracles.
4. Dogmatic interpretation of the Bible settled upon by early and later theologians.

Arnold's beliefs will stand the test of time, for they can remain unshaken in the face of science and its discoveries. Natural law and divine law do not clash; instead they are one and the same thing. Conduct is the mainspring of of man's actions; right living the key to achievement and inward peace. God is the law of righteousness; and Christ, the teacher. "Culture", said Arnold repeatedly, "is to make the reason and will of God prevail." Also, "Bishop Wilson has admirably put it, that 'to promote the kingdom of God is to increase and hasten one's own happiness.'"[1] Indeed, it may truthfully be maintained that Arnold's religion was a firm one, for he personally founded it upon a few simple but noble precepts in which he could whole-heartedly believe. He had done this in the midst of a great religious upheaval which had been nation-wide for more than half a century. He wished, too, that his method might give balm to other troubled souls. And so in 1870, with the publication of St. Paul and Protestantism, he had become the avowed sponsor of

[1] Culture and Anarchy - p. 12

liberated religion. Again he says, "I write to convince the lover of religion that by following habits of intellectual seriousness he need not, so far as religion is concerned, lose anything."[1] Tribute to the ideals in his writing is paid by a sympathetic critic and biographer, George Russell. "Beyond doubt, by his insistence on the relation of Letters to Religion, he helped many young men to read their Bibles with better understanding and keener appreciation; and enable them that are without to enter for the first time into the spirit and attractiveness of the Christian ideal."[2] For those who still think that Matthew Arnold was heretic and enemy of Christianity, this little story, also told by Mr. Russell, may challenge them to a fairer evaluation. "A Catholic priest, ministering formerly in the Roman and now in the English Church, thus describes the help which he gained from Arnold at a time of distress and transition. 'That I held to any sort of Christianity, and continued to use and enjoy the Bible, I owe entirely to Matthew Arnold.'"[3]

Now among other biographers and critics of Matthew Arnold, George Saintsbury holds a prominent place. He also was one of the severest critics, contending that

1 Preface to God and the Bible

2 Matthew Arnold - p. 251

3 Matthew Arnold - p. 250

Arnold put away his talent when he forsook poetry. Particularly was he opposed to the religious writings. Speaking of Literature and Dogma, he says with no restrictions, "It was thus by far Mr. Arnold's most popular book; I repeat also that it is quite his worst."[1] We think this criticism quite unfair, but however that may be, Saintsbury continues his remarks by defending Arnold against alleged charges: "Literature and Dogma, to do it strict justice, is certainly not in intention at any rate, a destructive book. It is meant, and meant very seriously, to be constructive."[2]

It is reasonable, therefore, to believe that as the Time-Spirit, always bringing greater tolerance and freedom of thought in its wake, liberates religion from its bondage of creed and dogma, so also will it assuage the harshness of criticism directed against Matthew Arnold's religious enterprises. Far from being irreligious, he was, in reality, a deeply religious man. Otherwise he would not have concerned himself so earnestly and gravely with religious matters. That could not have been unless he had been writing from a negative and destructive point of view. But all of his remarks as to the purpose of his writing bear out an opinion to the contrary. He wrote about religion with reluctance because perhaps he feared that his liberal and unconventional ideas might

1 Matthew Arnold - p. 132

2 Matthew Arnold - p. 135

arouse the criticisms they did. But, nevertheless, write about it he did, because he hoped that he might turn men's faces once again in the direction of the things, religious in nature, which really count in the continuance of a better society. We may say, in the last analysis, that his purpose was as social as it was religious. For be it remembered that Arnold, an idealist himself, cherished the notion that the ideal might some day be made a part of the actual world. He looked for the betterment of the masses through the rightful ends of government, education, art, and religion.

Here we have purposed to show, as exactly as possible, his thoughts about the latter, which was just one among many of his intellectual activities. We believe that in this field, as well as in the one of education, in which his services have long since been acknowledged, he intended to serve mankind faithfully. A man of many and varied interests, which even in a thesis of this nature ought not to be forgotten, he well merited the praise George Russell gave to him in the closing chapter of his book, Matthew Arnold. Because it seems to sum up admirably the many services of a noble life, we quote it here: "He showed us the highest ideal of character and conduct. He so interpreted nature that we knew her as we had never known her before. He was our fascinating guide in the tangled paradise of literature. And while for all this we bless his memory, we claim for

him the praise of having enlarged to boundaries of the Christian Kingdom by making the lives of men sweeter, brighter, and more humane."[1]

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Matthew Arnold - p. 265

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